

THE KAISERSLAUTERN CHAPEL

A BRIEF HISTORY

The story of the Kaiserslautern Chapel goes back several years, and encompasses much love, considerable effort and a fair share of mistakes. In 1956, before the “[b]uilding [p]rogram” as such came to Europe, a rather modest group of [LDS] servicemen began the effort. Under the leadership of Branch President Lars Jensen, permission was solicited from mission authorities and fund raising projects were started. Through subsequent presidents of the American [b]ranch, fundraising activities continued, until by the time the [c]hapel was actually started, they had raised in excess of \$12,000.00.

During the first planning months, it was explained by mission authorities, that the building would have to be built in conjunction with the German [LDS] [b]ranch in Kaiserslautern. The [s]ervicemen’s [b]ranch welcomed the prospect of help from their German bretheren [brethren], and were happy to be able to share the blessings of such a project with them. The [s]ervicemen were also quick to see the value of a fine [LDS] [c]hapel as a missionary tool. The primary goal however, was an [LDS] [c]hapel for [LDS] [s]ervicemen. This is not just a passing thought with them. It was something about which they feel very keenly, and could speak very eloquently. The wish was for “a home type Mormon [c]hapel”, with adequate facilities, where a full church program could be enjoyed by them and their families. Not that this was a particularly selfish desire, for they realized that many who contributed and helped would never be able to see the finished product. Their dream is perhaps significant only to those in the service; who in their semi-nomadic way of life, are frequently faced with the frustration and disappointment that comes from being sent to a location where there are little or no church facilities. Facilities to aid them in rearing their families as [o]ur Heavenly Father has directed. It is interesting to note the surprise and delight registered by new families when they discover a completely functioning “Mormon community” in the heart of Germany. It is now a community that offers the full church program, from Priesthood to Fast meetings and from Relief Society to Scouting. It is not necessary to elaborate here on the blessings derived from our chapels, only to point out that servicemen and their families must frequently go without these blessings. Yes, perhaps you would have to be a member of a service family, to appreciate how much these fine people wanted this building in Kaiserslautern. If they could share this blessing with the German Saints and help the missionary program at the same time, so much the better.

A name that stands out in bringing about the realization of this dream, is that of Brother Don Lewis. The construction of a [c]hapel in Kaiserslautern became almost an obsession with him. He and his wife spent countless hours working for the project, and when his normal tour of duty was up, they extended their time in Germany in order that they might continue the work. It certainly wasn’t easy work. The going and coming of Mission Presidents, the anticipated [b]uilding [p]rogram, and subsequent action by the neophite [neophyte] Building Committee in Bermany [Germany], tended to bring about a somewhat confused atmosphere. It was an [a]tmosphere that could have been discouraging to lesser men. But, secure in the knowledge that the work of the Lord will go forward, Brother Lewis [c]heerfully continued to push for his “favorite project”.

In October of 1960, Fred Biesinger and his wife Helen were interviewed by Wendell Mendenhall for a mission to Europe, to assist in the new [b]uilding program. It was suggested by Brother Mendenhall that the Biesingers put their affairs in order as quickly as possible because the need for help in Europe was acute. By June of 1961 the Biesingers together with their 3 children, Keith, Mark, and Helen Louis[e?], arrived at Frankfurt Airport. They were immediately assigned to the Kaiserslautern project. Next came an introduction to President Lewis, and instructions to contact the project [a]rchitect to determine a starting date.

Brother Biesinger together with Brother Lewis, then held a meeting with their German [a]rchitect, Willibald Hemmer, to ascertain how quickly the project could be under way. The [a]rchitect stated flatly to these brethren [brethren] that the plans were not sufficiently completed to set a starting date, and that he had several other things that had to be done, not least of which was a vacation in August. He further wanted to know what particular interest Brother Biesinger had in the [p]roject. It was obvious that the [a]rchitect had a complete lack of knowledge of the Church [b]uilding program. At this meeting and several subsequent meetings he expressed extreme reluctance to even consider working with the program. He stated that he felt secure in his stand by virtue of the contract that he had with the Church. There are many excuses for this poor orientation of the [a]rchitect. Foremost was the fear that if Herr Hemmer were pushed too hard or too far, that he might withdraw as the [a]rchitect, and with his withdrawal would come the collapse of the Kaiserslautern project. It is not necessary to dwell on this particular phase, only to point out the single cause of the failure of the program in the first one half of construction.

Early in September the [a]rchitect let it be known that sufficient plans and preparations had been made to make a start about the middle of the month. As a result, on September 15, an orientation meeting was held in the Kleber Kaserne military chapel for both the American and German [b]ranches. Brothers Gygi, Ehlers, and Crandall of the Building Committee, President Royal Hunt of the West German Mission, and Brother Fred Biesinger were also there. As in [is] the case in orientation meetings, the complete building program was explained; both the obligations of and the benefits of to the branches. Because Kaiserslautern has 2 branches, it was necessary to further clarify the specific obligations of each [b]ranch. After complete explanation of the program and a question and answer session, the decision to accept or reject the program was put to vote of the Priesthood and to the Relief Society [P]residencies. The program was accepted unanimously, and the members were told that if they lived up to their promises, the Kaiserslautern building project would be carried through to a successful completion. The following day, September 16, 1961, ground breaking ceremonies were held at the site. Architect Hemmer was there and was asked to say a few words. Among other things, he stated that he hoped he would be able to construct this building so that both the members and the City of Kaiserslautern would be proud of it. They were fine words, but they drew attention to the fact that he considered in his project. It is interesting to compare the words he spoke then with the words he spoke 21 months later at the completion Thanksgiving service. On that occasion he warmly praised the membership for their accomplishment. It was a gratifying change in the attitude of a fine old gentleman.

By the time of the groundbreaking, the Architects [architect's] office had gathered from various German contractors, bids for the construction of the complete rough building. The rough building in German terminology, is approximately 50% of the completed building, and includes most of the work necessary for the application of the roofing. The [a]rchitect was ready to award the contract to one of the bidding firms. After having the contract read that Herr Hemmer had prepared, it was noted that the contract, if accepted, would make the building program unworkable. However, the contract was signed by Brother Gygi, and the [b]ranches lost the opportunity to utilize the building program for the first one half of the construction.

In May 1962 Brother Frank Berg, who had replaced Brother Gygi as [A]rea [S]upervisor, decided with Brother Biesinger, that any work subsequent to the rough building contract must be done by the branch. This was considered the wise thing to do, even at the risk of incurring [incurring] the wrath [wrath] of the [a]rchitect. Brother Berg felt that the building program had to be implemented in Kaiserslautern.

It is at this point that you can see the hand of the Lord and enter in. In Germany at the time there was young American serviceman that was in every way capable of doing the very difficult task of the electrical wiring. If the electrical work on the building could be successfully taken over by the branch, it would be [“]the foot in the door” that was needed with the [a]rchitect, and at this particular moment the success of the program hinged on Fred Gloschat, our young electrician. Because the [a]rchitect had been so successful at saying “no” every time he was approached for permission for the [b]ranches to take over any part of the construction, it was determined in this case to proceed without asking permission. So, the work was started at a time when it was known that the [a]rchitect would be out of the city for 3 or 4 days. It was hoped that enough work could be done in this time to make it impractical to tear it out. Also if the work could be done well enough, perhaps it would allay some of the [a]rchitect’s apprehensions as to the ability of the church members to do this type of work. It was an anxious moment for those who were present on the job site with Herr Hemmer returned and noticed the “unauthorized” work and that had been done. When he could find no fault with the workmanship, he stated that it still would not do, because electrical work, by law, had to be done under the direction of the German master electrician. Herr Hemmer did not know that Brother Biesinger and Brother Gloschat had discussed this problem with the chief electrical inspector Kaiserslautern, a man by the name of Ringlin. The [b]uilding [p]rogram was explained to Herr Ringlin and he was informed of the churches [Church’s] problems in Kaiserslautern. He was asked if you could recommend an electrical master, who for a fee might let the work be done by the [C]hurch, under his name. Herr Ringlin contemplated a few moments and then stated that he knew of no one he could recommend who would do it for a fee. However, as the city official in charge of electrical permits and inspections, and also as a master electrician, he would do it without a fee. It seems fair to say that this man’s cooperation and gracious help should be noted as further evidence of the Lord’s hand in this work. Of course when Herr Hemmer heard who was acting as the electrical master on the job, his bases for objection was [were] gone.

Next, closely following the electrical work, was the plastering. Here again the Church and Kaiserslautern was very blessed in having a young German convert by the name of Paul Widmaier, who was a journeyman plasterer. At first Brother Widmaier was reluctant to take on such a responsibility, and was not at all convinced of the workability of the program. However, he was given the challenge and he accepted. Brother Widmaier worked faithfully and hard. Because this was such a critical time, in that we were attempting to convince the [a]rchitect of our ability as well as our determination, his doing the plastering was the act that would finally convince the [a]rchitect that the Lord’s [b]uilding [p]rogram had indeed come to Kaiserslautern. When Herr Hemmer walked on the job and saw Herr Widmaier doing the plastering, he asked simply, “Herr Widmaier, are you doing this work?” Paul answered in the affirmative, and Herr Hemmer showed genuine relief to find that the church could furnish such qualified workers. He recognized Brother Widmaier as a foreman of one of the leading plastering firms in Kaiserslautern.

The activity of the [b]uilding [p]rogram was now on the increase as was Herr Hemmer’s cooperation. Our next step was to get some [b]uilding [m]issionaries. The first one, Dieter Benton, arrived July 16, 1962. Next in order, arrived Norbert Primas, August 1, 1962, Wolfgang Eder, September, 1962 and Wolfgang Fiebelkorn, September, 1962. These young men deserve a great deal of credit. The hours they worked and the sacrifices they made should always be appreciated by those who utilize and benefit from the building in Kaiserslautern. Norbert Primas was always uncomplaining and diligent in his efforts to serve. He enjoyed his work and was always quick to learn. Wolfgang Eder had only been in the Church 3 months when he was called on his mission. This is in itself, [sic] a testimony to his desire to do what is right and to serve his Father in Heaven. Wolfgang Fiebelkorn was a rare combination of faithfulness and ability. He never hesitated to further the spirit of the [b]uilding [p]rogram, and even though even he had never done it before,

he very successfully installed the extensive tile in glass block work. As the building began to draw to a close, other missionaries were sent to help. All of them served well and faithfully. There [They] were Volger [*sic*] Hagen, who very capable [capably] helped with the cabinet work, Wolfram Bruns who assisted with the painting, and Rainer Peters who worked with Brother Peter Van Hulten with the stucco work[.] All contributed considerably to the finish job.

The crux of the Building Missionary Program of course, are the [b]uilding [m]issionaries. Here, with these boys, is where the great challenge of the program lies. In Kaiserslautern, as on other job sites, the boys presented many problems. However, it can be stated that the boys were a credit to themselves and to the [C]hurch.

In addition to the [b]uilding [m]issionaries, Brothers Don Lehman, William Kramer, Fred Rodell, and Peter Van Hulten, also came for a short time to assist with the work. Brother Lehman, with his congenial, cheerful nature, would be a great help on any job, as would Brother Kramer, with his life a monument to his great faith in the [C]hurch.

By the time the [b]uilding [p]rogram was able to be put into effect, Brother Lewis had been replaced as Branch President by Brother Ritchie. Brother Ritchie proved himself to be an excellent judge of men when he appointed his counselor, Arlin Sorenson, to be the head of the Branch Building Committee. The enthusiasm with which Brother Sorenson served in this capacity was a genuine inspiration to all. His attitude with the job supervisor was always, "just tell me what you need and I'll see you that you got it". As the German [b]ranch began to falter in their obligation to care for the missionaries, Brother Sorenson was there to step in and coordinate the American [b]ranch activities so they included this care.

In the final stages the project, Brother Jacob Wagner arrived from Salt Lake City, to assume the very difficult job of Branch President of the German [b]ranch. He, together with Brother Ludwig Strottner, Brother Widmaier, and several of the sweet German sisters, proved themselves to be true Latter Day Saints. They made a genuine effort to fulfill their obligations to the [b]uilding [p]roject.

Brother Biesinger noted that he had seen enthusiastic groups donate labor for the construction of chapels before, but never with the whole hearted enthusiasm of the [K]aiserslautern American [b]ranch. Brother Ritchie was responsible for obtaining heavy equipment that worked many hours on the new chapel. One week alone there were six, eight yard dump trucks, a heavy duty front end loader, a crane, and a Catapillar [Caterpillar] D-8 tractor, working on the job site. During that week, an army officer stopped and identified himself as the Kaiserslautern Post Chaplain. He said, "I don't know how you do it. I have a post chapel that needs a small fence painted, and I can't even get that done." Yet never at any time, from the first equipment obtained by Brother Ritchie to clear the job site prior to construction, to the last truck obtained by Brother George Willmore to haul left over materials to Darmstadt, were any improper methods used to obtain this equipment. Proper channels and authority were always sought. The success these men had in obtaining this valuable equipment shows how highly they were regarded by their supervisors. Brother Dave Stenquist, a very able craftsman as well as a pilot in the Air Force, would say after a days [day's] work on the project, "Well, Brother Biesinger, if you'll excuse me now, I'd better get home to bed, I only have six hours left before I must be on duty." Brother Gloschat frequently worked the clock around on the jobsite, stopping maybe for a few hours of sleep, curled up in the corner of one of the unfurnished rooms. Missionary Norbert Primas often assisted Brother Gloschat on all night [m]arathons. One morning Brother Biesinger decided to get on the job early as he had a very busy day ahead. He arrived on the job about 5:00 A.M. expecting to be the first one

there. But [But] already on the site working with a pick and shovel was Paul Eckel. "My duty has been such that I've been unable to get much time in evenings or Saturdays", said Paul, "so I figure the early hours are all that's left to me". Brother Ralph Findlay was a real moral [morale] booster as he would arrive on the job, trade his colonels [colonel's] uniform for work clothes and become a very hard working "hod carrier". Brother Carbine designed and installed the very superior sound system. Not only did he donate time and talent, buty [but] also managed to have a hard time remembering to turn in all of his expenses that he incurred while fulfilling his assignment. Brother Telford probably did less talking per hours worked than [than] any other member of the branch. "Just give me a job and I'll do my best to do it", he would say, and that would be the last heard from Brother Telford until he needed more work. The fine pulpit and sacrament table will always be a credit to the diligence of Brother William Haygood. Brother Haygood is an exceptionally talented cabinet maker, and the [b]ranch was very fortunate to have him, as it was Brother Willmore, and [an] accomplished painter. Bob Caris, converted to the [C]hurch after the building had been started, with Carroll Berryman and Jack Peterson were always there to help lead and take on positions of responsibility. Brother Bob Lewis would smile if he were called a leader in construction work, buty [but] Bretheren [brethren] like him, Don Adams, Dean Benson, Lloyd Partridge, Ron Benson, Nelson Wright, and Deloy Gardner, were all leaders by virtue of their willingness and dependability. Then there were those who made themselves conspicuous by being the "doers", men who were always there, evening after evening and Saturday after Saturday. If an Honor Roll were made up, it would look something like this.

D. H. Deford	Donald Knudson	Gary Syme	Gary Brockbank
Jay E. Farrel	Dean Benson	Norman L[o?]vendale	Darold Dougal
Mike Moorda	Terral Knudson	Dennis Carbine	Thomas Atkin
Carroll Berryman	Loyd [sic] Partridge	William Haygood	Robert Huds[o?]n
Paul Eckel	Bob Telford	Allen Lendes	Bro. Diemer
Bob Chambers	Gary Lundbery	M. Schwobel	Bro. Bayer
Fredrick Morian	Jack Peterson	Robert Lewis	Keith Biesinger
Alfred Kreutner	Jay Benson	EdLuberski [sic]	Steve Tyler
Lester Card	Dave Stenquist	W. Halter	Le [sic] Ashby
Fred Gloschat	Hyrum Knudson	Mark Partridge	Camer[o?]n Card
W. D. Adams	Dennis Knudson	Gary Lunt	Joe Card
Bonner Ritchie	Ron Benson	Larry Davis	Robert Caris
Arlin Sorenson	Frank D[o?]lm[oe?]	Fred Sorenson	Gary Davis
George Willmore	Michael Stillman	L[o?]than Niemann	Tony Hughes
Walter Wilkins[o?]n	James Schraner	Max Kr[o?]utner	Bro. Oberlus
Paul Widmaier	John Peterson	David Hughes	Ch[e?]ster Witesides
Ralph Findlay	Serve Huss	Maurice Murri	Bob Armstrong
Ludwig Strottner	Thurman Elmore	Wm [sic] E. Perkins	Sheld[o?]n Ewell
	Lyman Draper	Stewart Tr[e?]fzger	

All of this however, still tells only part of the story. Every Saturday each worker on the jobsite was given a warm meal, prepared by the ever faithful and hard working Relief Society [s]isters. Buty [but] as important as it was, the sisters weren't satisfied with this secondary job. They wanted to take part in a more direct way. As a result, keeping the building "p[o?]lice [polished?] up" became an additional obligation. In this area the German Relief Society sister [sisters?] set a fine example for their branch. Sister Scharf, the German Relief Society President, was on the job every day, six days a week, for the last two months of construction. This sweet soul was willing to do anything, all she wanted was work.

By March of 1963, the time had arrived to consider the installation of the drapes in the new building. Because of the exp[a?]nse of the drapery material and the large amount of material involved, (it took nearly 1600 meters), Brother Andrews of the Church Building Committee felt it unwise for the sister [sisters?] to undertake the making of the drapes. The branch members took issue with Brother

Andrews however, they felt they had already been deprived of too much of the [b]uilding [p]rogram to allow any part of it to go to waste. So, with permission of Brother Berg, and under the supervision of Helel [Helen] Biesinger, Clare Benson, and J[o?]an Card, the Kaiserslautern sisters undertook the project that, 1,001 work hours later, produced a most beautifully draped building.

By June 15, 1963, the new chapel was ready for inspection by the Building [C]ommittee, prior to the Thanksgiving [s]ervice. On this day an accident occurred in which Brother Jacob Snyder was seriously injured. Brother Snyder had been chosen to be the Building Custodian. Fortunately, Brother Snyder subsequently fully recovered and was able to resume his duties at the chapel. After the Thanksgiving [s]ervices, a new [s]ervicemen's Branch [P]residency was installed. Brother Blaine Jensen was set apart as President, with Nelson Wright and Robert Telford as his counselors. To these men fell the task of catching up on the construction odds and ends, and putting the finishing touches on the building that always come up at the last. It also became the responsibility of these men to set up and [an] efficient and orderly schedule for the maintenance and use of the building. It is good to see how seriously Brother Jensen takes this responsibility.

These words of [p]raise are a sincere attempt to give credit for the success of the Kaiserslautern project where it belongs. However, we recognize we must give credit to our [H]eavenly Father for making all things possible. And next we recognize how blessed we are to be members of His Church, led by His Prophet. This [b]uilding [p]rogram, that has been sanctioned by the Prophet, offers a rare opportunity for us to express our love for our [H]eavenly [F]ather. It seems fair to say that many people in Kaiserslautern too [took] advantage of this opportunity. On the last 50% of the building construction, members of the combined branches logged in excess of 11,000 hours worked. The [b]uilding [m]issionaries were supported as the program required, and thousands of dollars were raised that the [b]uilding [p]rogram ordinarily does not require. While in all honesty it must be noted that better than 93% of the mentioned accomplishments were by the American [b]ranch, every German and American Brethern [brother] alike who tried to do their part, can take pride in the finished building.

People do not prove themselves to their Heavenly Father until they are willing to show their faith by deeds as well as words. In the [b]uilding [p]rogram in Kaiserslautern there was an exceptional show of faith by deeds. As the Supervisor of Construction on the [c]hapel, I came as the teacher. However, I am leaving as the pupil. I will always treasure the lessons in faith taught me by the good Church members in Kaiserslautern.

The above was extracted from previous Branch Historical Report. It was felt by the Branch Presidency that this story would be of interest [interest] to the present members

Kaiserslautern Branch Presidency
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